PARIS, France - Auchan's head of French operations has stepped down after 11 years in the job, the French retailer said on Thursday.

Auchan France Chief Executive Arnaud Mulliez is leaving the company for personal reasons, the company said in a statement. He will be temporarily replaced by Henri Mathias, 62, who has served as vice president for the French business since 2003.

Auchan, which competes with European leader Carrefour, ranked fifth in France last year with a market share of 11.3 percent.

Arnaud Mulliez, 55, is the son of Gerard Mulliez, founder of the group now headed by Arnaud's cousin Vianney Mulliez.

The family controls 88.88 percent of Auchan's capital, with the remainder held by employees. It is present in 16 countries and has 302,500 staff, including 72,000 in France.

In France alone, which accounted for 42 percent of group revenue last year, the group operates 128 hypermarkets and 262 supermarkets.

In August it reported a 17 percent drop in first-half operating profit reflecting difficulties in Italy and in France, where the company is engaged in a fierce price war to lure cash-strapped shoppers.